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IDENTICAL LETTERS DATED 18 MAY 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AFGHANISTAN TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL AND TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to forward herewith a letter dated 17 May 1998 addressed to you from Dr. A. Abdullâh, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Islamic State of Afghanistan.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) A. G. Ravan FARHÂDI
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Identical letters dated 17 May 1998 from the Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan addressed to the Secretary-General and to the President of the Security Council

Early on Sunday 17 May 1998, Taliban war planes bombed heavily populated civilian targets in the Takhar provincial capital of Taluqan, killing 31 local residents and leaving 42 injured, some seriously.

The bombings, in four sorties, deliberately directed at civilian targets, struck the city's popular farmers' and artisans' market (known as mandayi) early on Sunday in the city Taluqan.

It is important to note that the Taliban, who had attended the United Nations-sponsored peace talks at Islamabad, Pakistan, in bad faith, unilaterally abandoned the scheduled Steering Committee's meetings, ostensibly for a "short break" to Kandahar, on 30 April 1998, in total disregard for their previously agreed commitments, thus prompting the collapse of the peace talks.

The Taliban's renewed air raids on Taluqan have achieved nothing militarily. Nevertheless, they follow a series of other attacks carried out by the Taliban in the Bangi and Nahreen districts of the same region on 2 May 1998, including a vast offensive on Ishkamish on 7 May 1998. The attacks originated from the Taliban-held Kunduz enclave.

In an open challenge to the laws and the customs of warfare, in defiance of all United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, in an expressed contempt for all internationally recognized human rights and norms, the Taliban are continuing to perpetrate war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

The Islamic State of Afghanistan follows with great interest the debate of the international community on the establishment of an international criminal court. The draft statute of the court contains explicit dispositions about starvation of a civilian population as a method of warfare and considers it a crime. The Taliban, as reported by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in December 1997 and also by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan in March 1998, not only blockaded the roads to Bamyan for nine months, but also prevented all humanitarian and relief supplies to the area.

We all bitterly recall, on one occasion at least, that the Taliban mercenaries bombed United Nations chartered airplanes at Bamyan airport in central Afghanistan, while an emergency airlift by the United Nations of highly needed foodstuff for the local non-combatants in the province was in progress. The repeated calls on the Taliban by the United Nations to let the emergency humanitarian operation continue went totally unheard.

In addition, the Taliban have been reported by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan to have focused on

the civilians of some ethnic groups in Afghanistan as the main target of their military operations. Two hundred and fifty thousand civilians were deported by the Taliban in the winter of 1997 because of their ethnic origin. This practice is deliberately being continued by the Taliban against the civilian population of Bamyan in central Afghanistan, an act considered to be a grave violation of humanitarian law subject to prosecution and punishment.

In view of the exacerbated belligerence and intransigence of the Taliban and the continued killings of the civilian population through its indiscriminate bombardments and shellings, one would find it rational to conclude that the Taliban mercenaries in Afghanistan have definitively decided to strive for a solely military solution.

It is further important to realize that the lip-service given by the military intelligence service of Pakistan to the Taliban's return to the negotiating table conceals a pre-schemed attempt to cover up the increasingly brutal military acts of the Taliban against the peacemaking efforts of the United Nations, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the international community.

Cognizant of the fact that the United Nations is unambiguous in its findings of the cause of deterioration of the situation in Afghanistan through the series of events in the country, I should like to reiterate the unchanged stance of my Government in recognizing the central role of the United Nations for bringing peace to Afghanistan in cooperation with the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the rest of the world family.

(Signed) Dr. A. ABDULLÂH
Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs
Islamic State of Afghanistan